

ATL RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATON

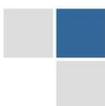
Pastoral Nomadism

Read the source below from Fletcher, "The Mongols: Ecological and Social Perspectives", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 46, No. 1 (Jun., 1986), pp.13-14:

[...] the pastoral habitat was the steppe, and the ecology was steppe pastoral nomadism and hunting. Adaptation to the steppe environment required the entire population to move on seasonal migrations in search of "water and grass," as the Chinese historians put it. The nomads had no villages, no fixed houses, although their migration routes were for the most part fixed. Such a life was hard and uncertain. The livestock of a camping group, most of the animal wealth of a tribe, even most of the herds of an entire confederation, could be lost virtually overnight to disease or starvation.

Aside from its unceasing migration, pastoral nomadism may have more in common with agrarian sedentarism than is commonly acknowledged. Even the steppe nomads practiced some cultivation, sowing crops in suitable places and coming back later to harvest them. But migration produces its own cultural and social dynamics and leads, therefore, to qualitative differences between the cultures and societies based on these two ecologies.

Animal husbandry and migration encourage two of the main characteristics that have distinguished the Eurasian steppe nomads throughout history: their initiative and their quick adaptability. To be constantly on the move, camping in strange places, was to force oneself to adapt constantly-and fast. Pastoral nomads had to adapt their culture to regular and seasonal changes of environment in times of peace and to abrupt and radical changes of environment in times of war. A kind of "natural selection" accustomed the nomads



to revel in a feeling of freedom. They liked to move and were able to do so.

Migration meant leadership, constant readiness to meet unforeseeable dangers, and being ever ready to fight. Leaders were accustomed to keeping their people and their herds in motion along their regular migration routes, a talent that helped them keep armies and herds of captives in motion too. Migration promoted martial qualities, the equestrian archer, the coordinated hunt in times of peace, the tactical army in times of war. When the men were on campaign, they could leave the herding to their women and children: pastoralism was not labor-intensive. The nomads were not obliged to defend any fields of crops or fixed dwellings, and they could, if they chose, easily sustain war in their own territory. In the steppe environment, war was not so destructive as it was in the sedentary world.

Questions:

State two pieces of information from the source (2).

Outline one advantage of the pastoral nomadism from the source above (4).